

Thank you to everybody who has recently subscribed to our email group. And thank you to everybody who has written to their MP or the secretary of state. It does help and the weight of our voice is essential as we move forward to rectify the cuts.

We have now heard back from GWR with their considered reply to each of the points we raised regarding the May timetable. Their responses are below. In brief the only concessions we have won are the reinstatement of the 1907 direct from Paddington and a tweak to one of the long waits at Newbury in the first off-peaks.

The reinstatement of the 1907 should have sorted out the Newbury connections for the later trains. However, GWR have not done this and there's no reason why they can't. Therefore we have gone back to them asking for this to be resolved for May such that we have decent connections at Newbury for the 2003 and 2104 Paddington departures. We have also asked for the 0803 (direct from Bedwyn) to be off-peak. This is highly unlikely to be granted, but asking does drive home the point of how bad the off-peak service will be.

Here follows GWR's response to our points.

Thank you again for reviewing the timetable and for meeting with Matt and his team to see what improvements might be possible. We have listed your suggestions below with comments against each. There are some changes that we are not going to be able to make, but we have looked closely at each suggestion and have explained why it is not possible.

There are also some changes that we will be bidding to Network Rail for approval to start in December. We will keep you updated on progress with those, and there are also some changes that we are able to make in May. The most significant being the return of the direct 1907 service from Paddington.

This did require DfT agreement and support, and we are grateful to Danny Kruger MP, Laura Farris MP, and the Rail Minister Wendy Morton MP for their help in securing that approval.

As you know we are also working on a bespoke contingency plan for Bedwyn, Hungerford and Kintbury to reduce the potential for missed connections and we will forward details of the plan early next week. This will include a direct contact in the performance team for you to report any problems or ideas for improvement once the new timetable starts.

Can one IET be found by either (i) swapping one of the 387 trains, which serve Paddington to Newbury, with an IET serving on the mainline to Bristol or by (ii) splitting a 10 car IET, serving on the mainline to Bristol, to give us the 5 car IET that we need?

We have looked at all options for swapping alternative IET circuits over to Class 387s. We have very few routes where IETs are used that are wholly under Overhead Lines and therefore suitable for all electric traction. The line to Bristol Temple Meads is only electrified to Thingley Junction (Chippenham) and our services to Bristol Parkway extend through to South Wales, where electrification is only complete to Cardiff and all services in the AM/PM peak extend to/from Swansea. We have identified already the 07:12 from Paddington to Cardiff which has already been made a Class 387 working but further opportunities do not exist.

There are also additional issues switching between IET and Class 387 on this route as it requires 125mph running on the Paddington-Bristol Parkway section. Any reduction in speed impacts all services on the route, particularly the freight trains booked to closely follow our services from passing loops. A reduction in our speed would mean there was insufficient time for them to get to the next passing loop behind our retimed service, which would have a very significant impact on the speed and performance of passenger services on the route.

Nor can we split any 10 car services. These are carefully allocated on the basis of passenger numbers and on set balancing to be sure we have the correct number of vehicles on our busy routes/services and can return IETs back to the right depot for servicing and maintenance each day. We are running less trains now in the morning and evening peak so the capacity of remaining services is key.

The 1907 Paddington departure will require a change at Newbury this gives a poor mid to late evening service.

We have found a solution. This does require an additional guard turn and required the agreement of the Minister of State for Rail, which has been secured. We can therefore return the 19:07 Paddington-Bedwyn to a direct service (also calling at Kintbury and Hungerford). The return working will also be direct, and this will start in the May 2022 timetable subject to Network Rail validation (which we expect to receive) with the changes being actioned later this week. The direct services will then appear in electronic systems – this generally takes a couple of weeks, we will get confirmation and send on.

The May timetable also has a flaw with the first off-peak in morning service. Currently this is the 0831 which is direct to Paddington (journey time 1:03). With the proposed May timetable the first off-peak would be the 0849, requiring two changes and a journey time to Paddington of 1:35 with the next service as the 0948 with one change but a journey time of 2:04. Can you operate the 0831 as an IET to give us a morning off-peak service?

We have looked at this very carefully, but we have not been able to find a solution. We are continuing to look at a couple of the morning workings to see if there is anything we can do to improve the situation for May or December, and we will keep you updated, but for now there are no changes in the morning peak.

We have however made some progress with a connection for the 09:48 Bedwyn-Newbury and have retimed the 10:06 Newbury-Reading to 10:12 to give a forward connection.

Adding a call on the 18:36 ex Padd at Kintbury

There isn't space in the timetable to make the extra call without impacting the 1904 Plymouth service which follows closely behind. We have however reduced the connection time at Newbury to 10 minutes for customers travelling to Kintbury from the 1836.

The 11:32 and 1321 weekday Newbury services do not call at Kintbury

We have not been able to amend this in May, due to other train paths. We are however re-bidding to Network Rail to add the calls in December and liaising with them about moving other services to accommodate the stops.

Weekend Calls at Hungerford

Subject to Network Rail final validation we will be able to add additional Saturday calls at Hungerford in May along with five additional calls at Hungerford on Sunday. We will also be bidding for another two Saturday calls in December and hope to add an 09:43 from Hungerford arriving Paddington at 10:29 and a 13:22 from Hungerford arriving Paddington at 14:13.

We will also bid for further Sunday calls in December, but this will require changes to other services (not GWR) so may not be possible. If they are agreed this would give Hungerford an additional 2 hourly service through the day

Best wishes

Steve Smith
Bedwyn Trains Passenger Group